

K-State's Engagement E-News

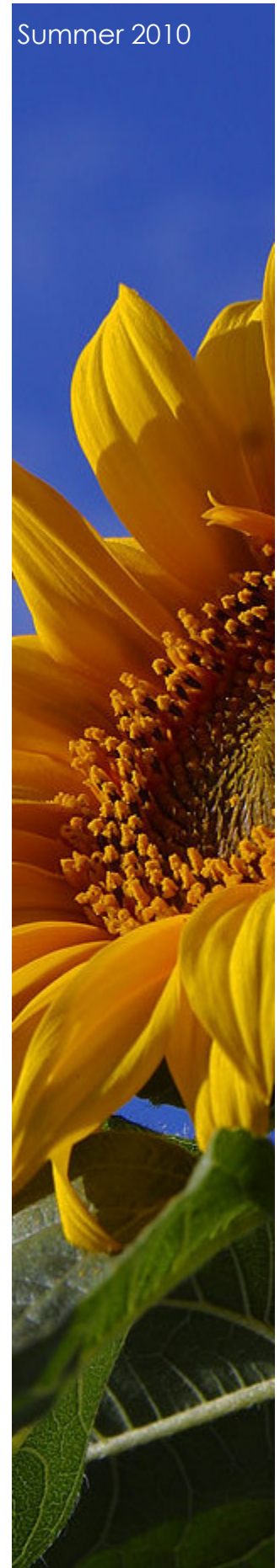
*Connecting K-State to Kansas
and Communities Worldwide*

K-State's Rural Grocery Initiative: Saving Rural America's Critical Infrastructure

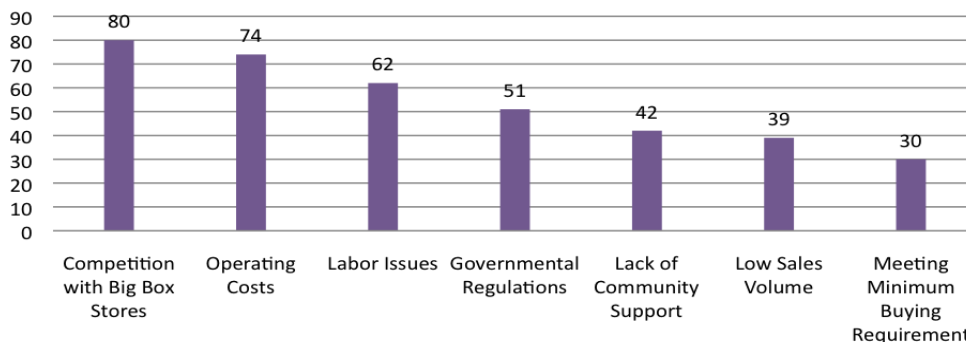
Local grocery stores represent a critical infrastructure for our rural communities. These stores are an important part of the economic engine that sustains rural communities, providing essential jobs and taxes. They are a vital source for nutrition and health, providing a supply of fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy and protein. These groceries are especially critical for the rural young, poor, and elderly. Grocery stores are also places where we meet friends, catch up on the latest news, build relationships and network with others. Grocery stores, like schools, restaurants, and post offices are a community asset used to recruit and retain citizens, providing a symbol of community health. Unfortunately, it seems every day we hear about another store closing shop and shutting their doors. In Kansas alone, 82 grocery stores in communities of fewer than 2,000 people have closed since 2007.

Because the loss of a grocery store threatens the health of local citizens, the local economy, and the very existence of that rural community, Kansas State University and a broad range of partners are working to assist rural communities and their grocery stores. We have been collecting data on rural grocery stores, identifying and archiving the latest research, and talking with a variety of stakeholders about grocery store challenges and best practices for sustainability.

On June 14-15, 2010, we hosted a rural grocer summit and brought together store owners, policy makers, citizen leaders, funders, and academics to talk with one another about how best to sustain this critical piece of community infrastructure. This newsletter provides a glimpse into the topics and people addressing the rural grocery initiative.



**Rural Grocer Challenges:
Percent of Owners Identifying Each Challenge**



Blacksmith Coffee

by Meghan Rausch

Mark and Nancy Galloway started Blacksmith Coffee in November 2008 with the goal of creating a coffee brand that would be the Kansas coffee. They wanted a coffee that would be roasted in a way to appeal to Kansas pallets and would also be affordable and Kansans could get it fresh.

Blacksmith Coffee, which the Galloways donated to the Rural Grocery Store Summit, can be purchased in almost 70 Kansas stores. However, you won't find their coffee in big box stores, only in smaller independent stores.

"We've taken the approach to focus on independent stores because they are like the lifeblood of the community. When those grocery



Papua-New Guinea Coffee, one of the many flavors of coffee that Blacksmith Coffee offers.

stores close, like schools and banks, usually the community starts to fall apart." Mark Galloway said.

By developing Blacksmith Coffee, the Galloways have taken their own approach to help rural grocery stores. "Independent grocery stores shouldn't try to compete with box stores, the Wal-Marts and Krogers of the world. They should develop a niche, something that consumers can't get at the box stores," said Galloway.

Blacksmith Coffee is a "niche product" that small stores can carry and box stores can't. The Kansas coffee gives people a reason to visit these independent grocery stores because consumers can't

get it anywhere else. Galloway believes that these unique products are key in getting customers, and would like to see others develop "niche products" as well.

Blacksmith Coffee is a great product for small independent stores because they don't have a minimum case quantity. Stores are able to mix and match different kinds of coffee in each box. The coffee is also roasted every Monday and gets shipped that same week, so grocery stores can get a fresh and affordable product.

For more information visit:
<http://blacksmithcoffee.com>



Rick Mills (left) with David Procter (right) was the lunchtime keynote speaker on Monday. He is the President of Walsh Community Grocery Store in Walsh, CO.



Chapman Grocery located in Chapman, KS.

Marci Penner

Meghan Rausch

Kansas State University's Center for Engagement and Community Development has recognized that the lack of rural grocery stores is a significant and growing problem. The 2010 Rural Grocery Store Summit has highlighted the problem and has brought it to the attention of others outside of Kansas.

Grocery store owners from as far as New Mexico, Minnesota, and North Dakota attended the summit.

Marci Penner is the executive director of the Kansas Sampler Foundation whose mission is to help preserve and sustain rural culture. Penner



Marci Penner (left) and **Renee Lippincott** leading discussion at the evening social event.

first brought the issue of closing rural grocery stores to the attention of the Center for Engagement and Community Development in 2006. Since then the Rural Grocery Initiative, after its second Rural Grocery Store Summit, has come a long way.

“That a university would focus on a rural issue such as grocery stores helped highlight the importance of this issue,” said Penner, “The conference helped shape this as a national issue, not just a Kansas issue.”

Rural Grocery Dialogues were held to

discuss ideas for improvements in grocery stores. The discussions provided great opportunities for networking and sharing with others grocery store best practices. People were able to discuss things such as marketing, distribution, and community support.

Penner was impressed with the outcomes of these events. “The networking was off the charts and the information gleaned was significant,” said Penner, “Still, the only outcome that will matter will be whether or not this focus leads to sustainability and thriving for rural grocery stores.”

The Rural Grocery Initiative continues to grow and become a bigger national issue. Penner has high hopes for the future of the initiative.

“Someday I hope we look back and see this as one of the early steps that led to innovative reform in the areas of policy, distribution, education, marketing, nutrition, and incorporation of local foods into our rural grocery store paradigm,” said Penner.

Penner, like many others, was pleased with the 2010 Rural Grocery Store Summit. “CECD should be commended for taking the lead with this issue,” said Penner, “They did an outstanding job in all aspects of bringing people together to further the discussion.”

CECD Mission & Vision

To promote engagement across the breadth of Kansas State University - in teaching, research and outreach - and to connect the vast resources of KSU to the significant issues of public need facing Kansas and communities worldwide.

Engagement occurs when collaborative partners — both on and off-campus stakeholders — work together to address a public need in a way that is both reciprocal and mutually beneficial. Through engagement, K-State endeavors to fulfill its historic land grant mission.

– Dr. David E. Procter, CECD director

Mark Wellbrock

by Meghan Rausch

The Rural Grocery Store Initiative is very important not only to grocery store owners, but also to the rural communities. Grocery stores are an important part of a community because they bring in money to support the community.

Mark Wellbrock is a rural grocery store owner who is also on the Rural Grocery Store Summit planning committee. Wellbrock and his wife own Jetmore Food Center in Jetmore,



Mark Wellbrock (left) with **David Procter** at the Social event, “It was the Best of Times, It was the Worst of Times”

Kans. located in Hodgeman County which has a population of approximately 2300. During his 27 years in the grocery store business he has been in several locations and in Jetmore since 2001.

Moving to a small community has given Wellbrock a new appreciation for small town life and the importance of community loyalty. It is very important for residents to support their community by shopping at their local grocery store. This becomes difficult when residents have jobs outside of the community and do their grocery shopping at box stores that are also outside of the community.

“People no longer rely on that community for a way of life,” Wellbrock said, “They want the structure and security that small town living provides for the family, but they’ve taken on the attitude they don’t have to support the community to retain those assets. Maybe they just take them for granted.”

According to Wellbrock, the rural grocery store initiative brings to light just how much rural communities are taken for granted. He says it shows “that our schools, our institutions, and our grocery stores are vital pieces in keeping the values and securities that we have come to know and appreciate in fact.”

The summit was a time for grocers, distributors and those interested in getting a grocery store to come together and discuss the problems rural grocery stores face. It also provided grocery store owners the opportunity to network with each other as well as with distributors and other resource providers.

Many rural grocers like Mark Wellbrock have found the summit to be an excellent networking and learning opportunity. “If we can network in settings such as these, form partnerships with institutions like Kansas State University, and have the development expertise of the Center for Engagement and Community Development we can have success where otherwise there would be failure. A collaborative spirit among government, education, business, and health and human services with positive communication is a great model for success.” Wellbrock said.

Wellbrock was pleased with the event and is proud to say that the Rural Grocery Initiative started in Kansas. “It’s a testimony to Kansans that we still have the drive and determination that our forefathers had when they forged this great state. We have become the national leaders in preservations of our rural heritage.”

For more information visit:
<http://ruralgrocery.org>



UPCOMING
EVENTS

Community Development Academy

The Community Development Academy is a series of workshops that will provide community leaders the assessment and strategic planning information necessary to devise participatory community development plans and strategies. Participants will gain the information, resources and processes needed to guide planning to create quality sustainable communities.

Dates	Location
September 22* & 23, 2010	Fort Hays State University
September 29 & 30, 2010	Robbins Center
October 6 & 7*, 2010	One Tiger Place Hays, KS

**indicates dates for community coaches only*

For more information or to register a team visit www.k-state.edu/cecd/cda/

Quotes from the Rural Grocery Store Summit

"I will utilize the rural grocery website to help our coop board make decisions and to educate and inform the community."

"I had a great experience. K-State is 2nd to none in the involvement with helping rural communities. They see a need & are trying to fill it."

"We will add marketing strategies to increase the customer base and overall sales. We'll also look to expand our inventory with unique/specialty products: it seems that many of the store owners are filling a niche that the big box stores can't."

"Hope! I learned that we are not alone in trying to keep rural stores and communities vital, vibrant, and growing. In addition I have gained a large 'library' of resources."

"It has renewed my initiative to work harder to get more involvement from the people who will benefit."

"It was very fun to hear about other small stores- Sometimes we do feel we are so far from things we forget there are others in our situation."

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